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THE EVANGELICAL AND CATHOLIC MISSION

WHAT THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
HAS SAID OFFICIALLY
ABOUT

WHO MAY RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH?

by

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A number of questions have been raised recently in regard to the reception of Communion in the Episcopal Church by non-Episcopalians. Unfortunately, in some dioceses, people are being told that "any baptized Christians may receive Holy Communion."

The 1979 General Convention has laid down clear guidelines, and they are to be strictly adhered to. The reason is simple: The Eucharist is generally necessary for salvation (BCP p. 860; Jn vi:53). However, anyone who receives the Sacrament without recognizing the Real Presence of Christ endangers his or her eternal soul (BCP p. 316; I Cor. xi:29). Hence we must both respect the consciences of those who do not see the essential nature of the Eucharist, and protect them (and those who fail to recognize the Real Presence) from endangering their souls.

We are therefore reminded of the Exhortation in the Prayer Book: "But if we are to share rightly in the celebration of these holy Mysteries, and be nourished by that spiritual Food, we must remember the dignity of that holy Sacrament. I therefore call upon you to consider how Saint Paul exhorts all persons to prepare themselves carefully before eating of that Bread and drinking that cup.

"For, as the benefit is great, if with penitent hearts and living faith we receive the holy Sacrament, so is the danger great, if we receive it improperly, not recognizing the Lord's Body" (pp. 316, 317).

The guidelines, as duly adopted by General Convention at Denver, are:

"Resolved by the House of Bishops (the House of Deputies concurring), that the following standard be adopted for those of other Churches who on occasion desire to receive the Holy Communion in the Episcopal Church:

a. They shall have been baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and shall have previously been admitted to the Holy Communion within the Church to which they belong.

b. They shall examine their lives, repent of their sins, and be in love and charity with all people, as this Church in its catechism (BCP, p. 860) says is required of all those who come to the Eucharist.

c. They shall approach the Holy Communion as an expression of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ whose sacrifice upon the cross was sufficient for all mankind.

d. They shall find in this Communion the means to strengthen their life within the Christian family 'through the forgiveness of (their) sins, the strengthening of (their) union with Christ and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet. . .' (BCP, pp. 859-60)

e. Their own consciences must always be respected as must the right of their own Church membership to determine the sacramental discipline of those who, by their own choice

make that their spiritual home." (1979 Journal, p. C-50).

These guidelines, then, tell us that a person may receive the Blessed Sacrament only if (1) that person is duly baptized and admitted to Communion; (2) has made a proper self-examination and preparation for Communion; (3) recognized the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament; (4) sees the Eucharist as a means to strengthening union with Christ, forgiveness of sins, and a foretaste of our communion with Christ in the life everlasting; and (5) does not violate either the conscience of the person receiving Communion, or the discipline of his or her Church.

Unless all five of the guidelines are met, a person should not receive the Sacrament, and no Episcopalian, lay or clergy, should ever encourage any person to receive Communion contrary to the guidelines. It is therefore suggested that at any special service where there might be non-Anglicans who might receive Communion, an announcement be made along these lines:

> *"All baptized persons who are admitted to Communion, who recognize the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, whose own conscience permits, and who are duly prepared to make their Communions are invited to receive Holy Communion."*